Pennsylvania - 17th District

17 George W. Gekas (R)

Of Harrisburg - Elected 1982

Born: April 14, 1930, Harrisburg, Pa.

Education: Dickinson College, B.A. 1952; Dickinson School of Law, LL.B., J.D. 1958.

Occupation: Lawyer.

Family: Wife, Evangeline Charas.

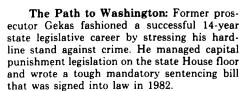
Religion: Greek Orthodox.

Military Career: Army, 1953-55.

Political Career: Pa. House, 1967-75; Pa. Senate, 1977-

83.

Capitol Office: 1008 Longworth Bldg. 20515; 225-4315.



As chairman of the Pennsylvania Senate's Judiciary Committee, Gekas earned a reputation as a skillful legislator. He also won some publicity outside the state when he helped craft a proposed revision in the insanity defense for criminal trials, presented it before the Criminal Justice Subcommittee of U.S. House Judiciary Committee and drew praise as a "pragmatist" from the panel's chairman, Michigan Democrat John Conyers Jr. The Gekas approach allows jurors to render a verdict of "guilty but mentally ill."

A member of the small but influential Greek community in Harrisburg, Gekas took the traditional path to political success in central Pennsylvania. He went to a local college and law school, became an assistant district attorney and aimed for the state Capitol, where he was Harrisburg's hometown legislator.

Gekas encountered remarkably few obstacles on his path to Congress in 1982. After weeks of hinting that he might run, he officially entered the race March 5 — ten days after Democratic incumbent Allen Ertel announced for governor and three days after the Republican-controlled Legislature approved new district boundaries that favored election of a Republican.

Gekas won the nomination handily, outpacing florist Brian J. McCarthy. The 27-year-old McCarthy was endorsed by the Republican committee in Lycoming County (Williamsport), the second most populous county in the district. But Gekas had the support of the GOP



organization in Dauphin County (Harrisburg) which was more important.

In the general election, Gekas trounced Dauphin County Commissioner Larry J. Hochendoner. The 33-year-old Democrat had run unsuccessfully for several local offices: Gekas defeated him by 10,000 votes in a state Senate election in 1976. He was appointed to his county post when a commissioner left to become Harrisburg's mayor.

Hochendoner's sole asset was Ertel's support. The two appeared together frequently, and Ertel, highly popular in the district, taped a television commercial for him. But Ertel's coattails were no match for Gekas's financial edge. Gekas outraised and outspent Hochendoner by about 3-to-1 and offered ads on television and radio almost daily from mid-September to Election Day. The Republican candidate's name appeared on buses and bill-boards throughout the district.

Gekas had the active backing of Republican U.S. Sen. John Heinz, who was coasting to re-election. Heinz signed a letter in support of Gekas that was sent to all Republican households in Dauphin County, and the two candidates shared volunteer help in part of the district.

Regarded as a personable campaigner. Gekas spent several of his evenings in local diners, waiting on tables in Williamsport, working at a cash register in Sunbury and serving pizza in Harrisburg. His principal television spot showed him eating lunch with local residents at a counter.

Gekas' other ads stressed crime and the economy, but issues played little role in the campaign. Hochendoner had no success trying to set up a referendum on President Reagan's economic policy. At a rally on World Food Day at which both candidates appeared.

George W. Gekas, R-Pa.

Pennsylvania 17

This elongated district, which follows the Susquehanna River, amply displays the GOP affinities of central Pennsylvania. Map makers made the 17th even more Republican in 1982 by joining rural Perry and Snyder counties to it.

Dauphin County (Harrisburg) has almost half the people in the 17th. Lycoming County (Williamsport) is second, with slightly more than a fourth of the population.

The large state government complex and manufacturing sector in Harrisburg provide enough Democratic votes to make the party competitive for local and state legislative offices. The state capital, which lost a fifth of its population over the last decade as whites moved to the suburbs, now is 40 percent black — a fact that enhances Democratic strength there. In 1982 Republicans could not keep Dauphin County from lining up behind Democrat Allen Ertel in his campaign for governor against Republican Richard L. Thornburgh.

The presence of the state government prevents life from being as placid in Dauphin County as it is elsewhere in central Pennsylvania. Aside from constant political flare-ups, the county has had to contend

Central — Harrisburg; Williamsport

with two other disasters in recent years: the 1972 flood, which put the governor's mansion and much of Harrisburg under water, and the 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

Up the river from Harrisburg, the hills and farms turn out predictably large Republican majorities, creating a normal GOP majority districtwide. Snyder and Union were among the three Pennsylvania counties to go for Barry Goldwater in 1964, and, in 1982, Snyder gave GOP Sen. John Heinz almost four times the vote of his Democratic challenger. Democrats can be found in coalmining Northumberland County and in Williamsport, which manufactures aircraft engines, publishes *Grit* magazine and hosts the Little League World Series.

Hershey, famed for its chocolate plant, grand old hotel and amusement park, brings out solid Republican votes, as do suburban Harrisburg towns such as Paxton Township and Lower Swatara.

Population: 515,900. White 476,806 (92%), Black 34,261 (7%). Spanish origin 4,637 (1%). 18 and over 376,440 (73%), 65 and over 63,411 (12%). Median age: 31.

Hochendoner tried to talk about unemployment, but Gekas steered the debate back to world hunger.

Gekas did talk about nuclear safety at frequent points during the campaign; the Three

Mile Island nuclear power plant is in the 17th District, and Gekas said he would press to hasten the cleanup of Unit 2 of the reactor, which had been shut down since the March 1979 accident.

Committees	
Judiciary (10th of 11 Republicans) Civil and Constitutional Rights; Criminal Justice	€.

Select Aging (20th of 22 Republicans) Housing and Consumer Interests.

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1982 General		
George W. Gekas (R)	84,291	(58%)
Larry Hochendoner (D)	61,974	(42%)
1982 Primary		
George W. Gekas (R)	25,773	(60%)
Brian McCarthy (R)	14,625	(34%)
Max Lampenfeld Jr. (R)	2,528	(6%)

District Vote For President

1980			1976		
	58,724 110,417 11,412	(61%)	D R	75,275 108,300	

Campaign Finance

1982	Receipts	Receipts from PACs		Expend- itures	
Gekas (R)	\$193,237	\$91,885	(48%)	\$171,918	
Hochendoner (D)	\$59,893	\$30,825	(51%)	\$59,590	

Key Vote

Adopt nuclear freeze (1983)

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